

# LOUISIANA PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH LAB

## The 2007 Spring Louisiana Survey

May 4, 2007

Sponsored by theanship School of Mass Communication's Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

### Five Years of the Louisiana Survey

The annual Louisiana Survey began with a simple idea: to provide a nonpartisan source of public opinion data to state opinion leaders and media outlets that could serve as a barometer of state public opinion. The release of the Spring 2007 Louisiana Survey marks our fifth year in providing this service and illustrates the importance of public opinion in the policy-making process. If the state is to overcome the challenges of rebuilding while also addressing other perennial concerns, it must do so with the public's backing.

*Spring 2007—Louisiana at a Crossroads:* Public opinion in Louisiana is at a crossroads. There are signs of encouragement and opportunity mixed with signs of pessimism. With this in mind, we offer the following observations based on the Spring 2007 Louisiana Survey.

- Louisianans are increasingly negative about the direction of the state, but are positive about state business conditions.
- Public attention continues to shift away from rebuilding but has yet to settle on another problem - offering state leaders the opportunity to set the political agenda in ways that move the state forward.
- Louisianans are concerned about the cost and availability of homeowners insurance but prefer a strong state role in regulating the insurance industry and providing insurance coverage of last resort.
- Louisianans continue to express concerns about corruption, and show strong support for ethics reform.
- Louisianans prefer using the budget surplus on recurring rather than one-time expenditures, but show less support for tax cuts than for providing health care for the uninsured, teacher pay raises, or funding for roads and infrastructure. Yet, Louisianans are increasingly inclined to say that state taxes are too high and need to be reduced.

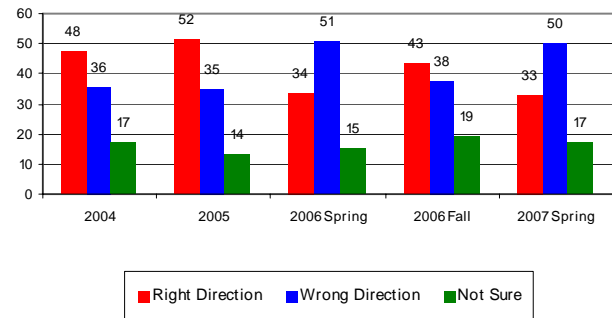
### About the Louisiana Survey

The mission of the Louisiana Survey is to establish benchmarks and assess progress and regressions in residents' assessments of state government services. The Survey has been conducted annually since 2002, and biannually in 2005 and 2006. The Spring 2007 Louisiana Survey reflects our continued efforts to help inform public policy through public opinion research. We hope that in providing this information, we have helped to advance the state. We would like to acknowledge and thank the Irene W. and Clark B. Pennington Foundation for its support of the Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 Louisiana Surveys.

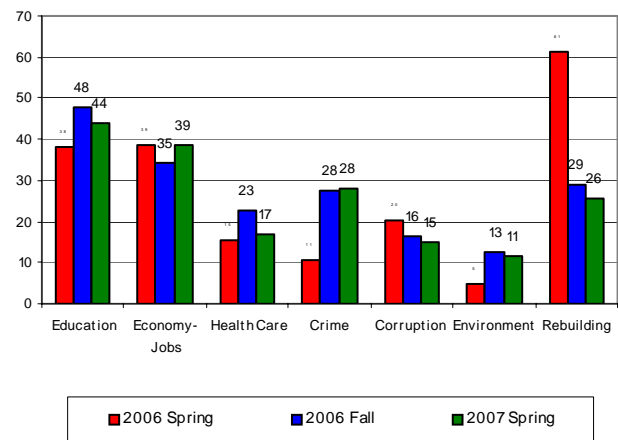


For the full report, see [www.survey.lsu.edu](http://www.survey.lsu.edu). For more information about the survey, contact Kirby Goidel, co-director of the PPRL and director of the survey, at 225-578-7588 or [kgoidel@lsu.edu](mailto:kgoidel@lsu.edu).

### Direction of the State



### Top Three Issues, 2003-2007



### Shifting Public Attention From Rebuilding

We continue to see public attention shifting away from rebuilding and toward other issues. Yet, no other problem has replaced rebuilding as the most important problem. Responses to this question are best classified in terms of their variance.

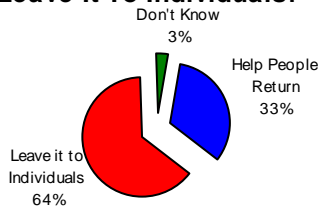
- The percent of respondents identifying rebuilding as one of the state's three most important problems continues to decline. The percent of respondents saying the state should increase spending on rebuilding has declined from 81 percent in Spring 2006 to 69 percent in the current survey.
- When asked to choose between their top spending priority and rebuilding, fewer people selected rebuilding.
- When asked directly if "we have paid too much attention to rebuilding New Orleans and need to think about other issues and other areas of the state," 51 percent of respondents agreed.

## Relocation, Voting, and Displaced Louisianans

Sixty-four percent of Louisianans said it should be left up to individuals as to whether they return and rebuild, and the state should play little if any role.

Louisianans are somewhat mixed on the question of whether displaced residents should be allowed to vote in the 2007 gubernatorial election. A substantial plurality of respondents (47 percent) said that any resident who has not returned since the hurricanes should not be allowed to vote. Slightly more than 50 percent of respondents, however, believe displaced residents should be allowed to vote but disagree on the role of the state in providing ballot access. Twenty-eight percent of respondents said displaced residents should be allowed to vote using existing rules for absentee ballots, while 23 percent said the state should actively encourage voting by setting up polling stations in areas with significant displaced populations.

### Should State Help People Return or Leave It To Individuals?



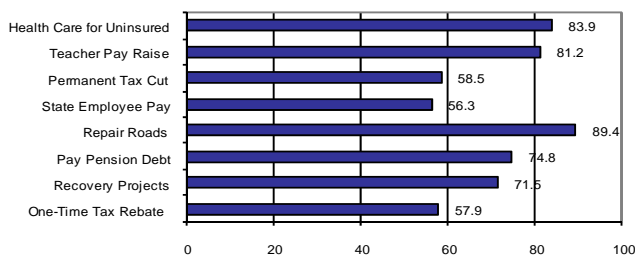
## Spending Priorities and the Budget Surplus

Fifty-eight percent of respondents prefer spending the surplus on recurring items, while 25 percent prefer one-time items and 17 percent say they do not know or are unsure.

When asked about different areas to spend one-time only monies, more respondents favored using the money to repair roads, followed by paying off the pension debt and recovery projects. Respondents were least favorable toward a tax rebate – though even here, 58 percent of respondents either strongly favored (17 percent) or favored a tax rebate (41 percent).

When asked about recurring budget items, respondents expressed the greatest support for providing health insurance for the uninsured, followed by teacher pay raises, a permanent tax cut, and a state employee pay raise. Eighty-four percent of respondents favored (54 percent) or strongly favored (30 percent) health care for the uninsured, while 82 percent favored (48 percent) or strongly favored (34 percent) a teacher pay raise. There is less support for a permanent tax cut, though again tax cuts yield majority support (58 percent).

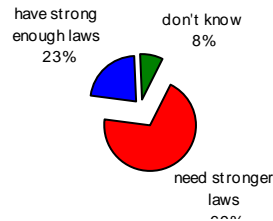
### Support for Various Proposals for Using the Budget Surplus



## Support for Stronger Ethics Laws

Over two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) said the state needs stronger ethics laws. Twenty-three percent of respondents said existing state ethics laws were strong enough. While there are differences across standard demographic categories, at no point did support for stronger ethics laws dip below 60 percent.

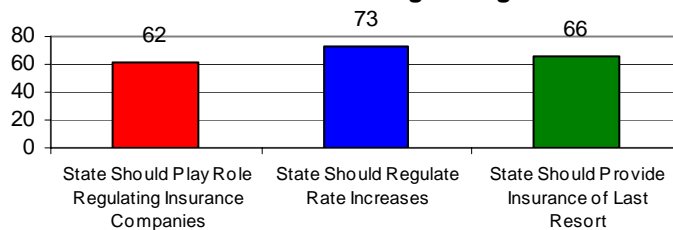
### Support for Stronger Ethics Laws



## Insurance Reform

Seventy-five percent of Louisianans with homeowners insurance noticed paying more for their coverage and 52 percent said they were worried they would not be able to afford or obtain insurance in the future. When it comes to reforming insurance practices, Louisiana residents prefer a state role. Sixty-two percent of Louisianans said they prefer state regulation over market forces; 73 percent wanted the state to regulate rate increases; and 66 percent want the state to provide insurance coverage as a last resort.

### Role of State In Regulating Insurance



## Methodology

The Public Policy Research Lab conducted the survey between March 16 and April 11, 2007. Calls were conducted from noon until 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 am to 6 pm on Saturday and noon to 8 pm on Sunday. Telephone numbers were selected using random digit dialing. The statewide survey has a sampling error of +/- 3.3 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we replicated the survey twenty times, only once will the answers differ by more than 3.3 percentage points over the answers in this report. The margin of error will be larger for subgroups, including the split ballot samples. The approximate margin of error for the split ballot samples is +/- 4.7 percentage points. The cooperation rate for the survey is 37 percent, meaning that 37 percent of calls in which a potential respondent was contacted yielded a completed interview. Differences in response rates among different segments of the population may result in biased estimates of public opinion. To account for these differences, data are often weighted by demographic characteristics where sample estimates do not closely mirror census-based population estimates. The results presented in this report are weighted to provide the most accurate estimate of population preferences possible. The data are also weighted to account for population shifts due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. These weights were constructed using the most recent census data available (released March 22, 2007) and account for populations shifts due the 2005 hurricanes at the parish level.